

BOSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

Ommm: Mintz lawyers forsake a billable hour for meditation time



GREG RYAN
Law and Money Reporter
Boston Business Journal

Time is money in the legal industry. Attorneys are judged by the amount of billable hours they rack up.

But in the Boston office of Mintz Levin Cohn Ferris Glovsky and Popeo PC, about 15 lawyers and staffers set aside 30 to 45 minutes every Wednesday to sit down together and do nothing.

Well, not nothing. They're practicing mindfulness, as a way to help ward off the stresses that come with a career at a high-powered law firm.

The sessions are the brainchild of Christopher Lhulier, an associate on Mintz's corporate law team. Lhulier first got interested in mindfulness more than a decade ago, when he moved to the Boston area with his wife and children. "It was sort of a new life for me, with a lot of positives coming with it, but I was in the thick of raising a family and all of the stresses that come along with it. I just felt drawn to doing it," he said.

The sessions started last year, after Lhulier approached Mintz human resources director Laurie Cappello with the idea. Brenda Fingold, the head of corporate outreach at UMass Medical School's Center for Mindfulness and herself a former Hale and Dorr LLP attorney, helped with the effort.

Lhulier had no idea how many people would come to the first session last December, but 55 lawyers and staffers took part, he said. About half of them continued on for the eight-week program. "At the end of the program, people didn't want to let it go. They said, 'This has been really good. It's been beneficial,'" Lhulier said.

Now, after training at the UMass Medical center, Lhulier and Cappello lead sessions on Wednesdays. Every other week, a retired lawyer leads a more formal session, complete with discussions about how to be mindful in the workplace. The group has turned a Mintz office into a meditation center. While roughly 15 people come every week, it's not always the same 15, according to Lhulier.

"I've been really pleased with the way the firm has been open-minded about this and appreci-

ating the longer-term benefit of a program like this," he said. "There are few, if any, Am Law 100 firms doing long-term programs like this."

Lhulier said meditation helps him with his practice. "It allows you to take a half-step back from whatever's going on, to be a little more objective," he said. "I'm not so quick to react. I'm more able to take in information and observe. Even when I am feeling emotions, it allows to be aware I'm feeling those emotions and not to be on autopilot as to what I'm going through."

When the sessions were first starting, one friend of Lhulier's at the firm told him he thought "it was kind of nonsense." But he gave it a shot, and has been coming back every week, Lhulier said.

Lhulier is making a point of ensuring all of the first-year associates know about the sessions. "To me, it's all about creating a sustainable practice," he said. "Anyone can go hard for three, five, seven years, but if you want to have a long-term successful law career, in my opinion what you're doing needs to be sustainable."